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California Performance Review Commission  
Attention: Margie Walker  
1400 10<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 100  
Sacramento, CA 95814

### Testimony: K-12 Education

Dear Co-Chairs Hauck and Kozberg:

This testimony is submitted on behalf of the Small School Districts' Association (SSDA). SSDA's testimony will be divided between the recommendations SSDA supports and the recommendations SSDA opposes.

#### Supported Recommendations:

SSDA supports the Education Technology Volunteerism, **Recommendation Number 6**, on Repeal of SB 1419. SSDA believes that SB 1419 has resulted in school districts not being able to maximize savings through contracting efficiencies. SB 1419 has had a chilling effect on school districts contracting with one another for classified services. SSDA believes that, at a minimum, school districts ought to be able to contract with each other, form JPA's, contract with cities or counties, or other public entities in order to perform business and maintenance services.

SSDA supports **Recommendation Number 7** to reduce the amount of mandated reports and paperwork required of school districts. Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) Jack O'Connell currently is working toward reducing mandated reports and consolidating information gathering. SSDA supports the SPI's actions and supports Recommendation Number 7 which would go further in reducing paperwork on school districts.

In addition, as a matter of efficiency and cost savings, SSDA believes it would be of long-term benefit to both students and to the state to adopt **Recommendation Number 8** regarding concurrent enrollment for high school students to attend college. We believe that this will encourage students to: 1) complete high school proficiency, 2) meet high school graduation standards and course level academic standards, and 3) speed the time through which a student would be required to attend college. Currently, many of our students in rural California do not attend four-year colleges. One reason is cost because most of the CSU and UC programs require five or more years for completion. Concurrent enrollment would enable these students to stay at home longer to acquire the classes and not have the same high cost of leaving home to attend a public four-year institution.

SSDA supports **Recommendation Number 13** to improve the special education mediation process. SSDA continues to be concerned about the number of mediations required and the outcome of those mediations where school districts face excessively high costs and are required to provide a much higher level of service than would otherwise be necessary. SSDA believes that instead of a full hearing and litigation, mediation can be more successful if the mediators are allowed to act as arbitrators.

SSDA strongly supports **Recommendation Number 23** which would allow rural community colleges to become four-year degree granting institutions. SSDA believes that this not only will reduce the very high costs that rural students face in attending four-year degree granting institutions, but it also will enhance the number of rural students to be able to complete four-year college degrees. SSDA believes that this will provide not only state savings, but will also provide savings to students and their families. Lastly, SSDA believes that this recommendation will expand and enhance the opportunities for rural economies to develop and have job creation rather than job loss in rural California.

SSDA supports **Recommendation Number 25**, which would enhance career vocational training. SSDA believes that increasing the number of courses providing real technical and vocational training for high school students will encourage more students to stay in school and pass the high school exit examination. These courses can be academically rigorous; these courses can meet grade level academic standards. SSDA believes that for numerous students, the acquisition of standards in academics through vocational and technical training is a more practical path for these students than is the traditional path for meeting the academic standards. SSDA believes that all students should have the opportunity to acquire career, technical and vocational training while in high school in order to have more options for their future choices in academic development, as well as employment.

While SSDA supports many of the recommendations proposed in the CPR, unfortunately SSDA must oppose some of the recommendations. Specifically, until there is full day preschool access for all children in all parts of the state, SSDA cannot support **Recommendation Number 11** regarding changing the entry age for kindergarten. SSDA recognizes that many students need more maturation prior to starting kindergarten, because kindergarten has become more of an academic rather than a socializing educational program. SSDA also believes that for some students, they will be ready for kindergarten even when they are four years-10 months on September 1 and that parents should have the opportunity to enroll such students in kindergarten. Finally, SSDA believes that along with parental choice to enroll some children, even at age 5, on September 1 who are not ready for kindergarten, parents should have the opportunity to have those students in an 18-month kindergarten starting in September or January and continuing through the next school year. SSDA believes that children in the developmental ages between 4 years-9 months and 5 years-6 months vary dramatically in their capabilities to benefit in an academic full day kindergarten program.

SSDA also opposes the elimination of county boards of education, county offices of education and the creation of regional K-12 education infrastructure. SSDA opposes **Recommendation Number 5** for numerous reasons:

- 1) Service Delivery to Small Districts: the current county office structure is more amenable to assisting smaller districts. Districts at the fringe of a large region will probably receive less assistance than a school district in the center of a large region. Most likely, the central parts of the regions will be larger urbanized areas, consequently, larger urbanized districts will have more access to region services while the fringe – more rural school districts – will have less access to services.

- 2) County offices of education should have expanded authority to assist school districts. For example, SSDA believes that COE's should be given incentives to provide and create JPA's that would allow school districts access to lower cost services in transportation, food services, budgeting, payroll and the other types of business functions. This system can also be expanded similar to the current special education model. Such a system could be used to hire a music teacher to serve for four or five different school districts. In addition to music, art and other types of instruction that occur on a weekly basis could be provided through a JPA.
- 3) SSDA also believes that county office services contracted by school districts should be exempt from the provisions of SB 1419. Even if SB 1419 is not repealed, the legislation ought to be modified to exempt contracting for a county joint powers authority or a county services consortium.
- 4) Counties should be given incentives to further regionalize such as they already have in the California Technology Assistance Project. The further regionalization for those types of activities that are most appropriate for regionalization which could be in the areas of curriculum, support and development, and more comprehensive professional development programs. SSDA believes there is a role for both individual county offices of education as well as a role for further regionalized services.

This concludes the SSDA testimony. Thank you for the opportunity to present SSDA's positions regarding the California Performance Review recommendations.

Sincerely,



David L. Walrath, Executive Director  
California Small School Districts' Association

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